

Washington, DC -- Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) hailed portions of the new Energy Legislation including language that permanently bans oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes. H.R. 6, the Energy Policy Act of 2005, overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives on a bipartisan vote of 275 to 156 Thursday. Five Illinois Democrats including Reps. Melissa Bean, Dan Lipinski, Jerry Costello, Bobby Rush and Lane Evans joined all nine Republican in the Illinois delegation to support the bipartisan legislation. H.R. 6 is expected to have strong bipartisan support in the Senate when they vote on the bill later this week.

“The Great Lakes supply 25 percent of the nation’s drinking water,” said Congressman Kirk. “All of this could be erased by a huge oil spill or natural gas fire from a drilling platform. We must protect our most precious freshwater resource and I’m glad this Energy legislation permanently bans drilling in the Great Lakes.”

Kirk was one of three Republicans who co-sponsored an amendment to H.R. 6 that permanently banned oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes. The amendment was not included in the House version of the Energy bill when it passed in June causing Kirk to vote against the original House legislation.

The Senate’s Energy Bill provided language banning oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes as well as other incentives not included in the House Bill including tax credits for hybrid cars, and no drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). These provisions were included in the final bill now set to become law.

“This bill is not perfect, but it lays the groundwork for developing renewable energy sources and promoting conservation,” said Kirk. “Hybrid and fuel cell technology is our future if we are ever to lessen our dependence on foreign oil. I’m glad this bill provides incentives for both. Most importantly, this legislation protects our Great Lakes and does not authorize drilling in Alaska’s wildlife refuge.”

Statistics suggest that after 26 years worth of oil and gas extraction, the seven producing wells beneath the Great Lakes do not produce enough energy to fuel the nation’s needs for even one day. The wells have produced enough natural gas to fuel the U.S. for nine hours and enough crude oil to fuel the U.S. for 35 minutes.

Currently, Michigan, New York, Wisconsin, Illinois and Ohio have drilling bans in their states, but Indiana, Pennsylvania and Minnesota do not. The federal ban will now trump the Indiana, Pennsylvania and Minnesota laws.

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